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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRISTINA 000115

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DEPT FOR DRL, INL, AND EUR/SCE, NSC FOR BRAUN, USUN FOR  
DREW SCHUFLETOWSKI, USOSCE FOR STEVE STEGER

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [UNMIK](#) [YI](#)

SUBJECT: KOSOVO: THE IMPORTANCE OF OPEN VOTING IN THE  
ASSEMBLY

Classified By: COM TINA KAIDANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: As we have seen in recent high-profile Kosovo Assembly deliberations, the use of secret ballots combined with weak party discipline and back-bencher discontent has greatly complicated our ability to get key legislation passed. Working with the leadership of the Assembly and other donors, USOP has been trying to reform existing procedures to ensure that MPs' votes become a matter of public record. Although most MPs support this effort, opposition leader Hashim Thaci has expressed opposition, claiming it is directed against his Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) and designed to keep the governing coalition in power. We have encouraged the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the main implementer of this reform, to work with Thaci and take into account any legitimate concerns, such as carving out secret voting for no-confidence motions, a practice not uncommon in the democratic world. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) At present, no one -- neither caucus leaders, fellow MPs, the media nor the public -- knows how MPs vote in the Kosovo Assembly. Since 2004, votes have been conducted with electronic voting equipment donated by the European Agency for Reconstruction, the assistance arm of the European Commission. The change to electronic voting was meant to increase transparency, speed up the voting process and ensure an accurate count; such voting equipment is common in the region. However, EAR's donation did not include the powerful projector necessary to project the names of MPs on the screen as they vote, and for this reason the votes have essentially been anonymous. Many MPs have become comfortable with this state of affairs and see no reason for change. Some have even made a sort of perverse virtue of secret voting, telling us that it gives them the 'independence' to vote their conscience and not their party's position.

13. (SBU) USOP/USAID, OSCE, and other international actors here have agreed that this situation needs to be remedied to increase transparency and accountability and bring Kosovo into line with the practice of democratic parliaments in the region and worldwide. With expertise from National Democratic Institute (NDI) personnel working at the Assembly, the move to formally establish this practice is now part of a

three-part reform package, which also includes standardizing the Assembly's agenda and normalizing committee reporting to the Assembly. The package represents the latest in a succession of reform efforts aimed at improving the Assembly rules and its functioning as a representative law making and oversight body. Earlier reforms have been well received by MPs, many of whom also support the current proposal.

¶4. (C) One exception to this support has been main opposition leader Hashim Thaci, president of the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK). Thaci has told us he fears open voting would threaten his ability to bring a vote of no-confidence against the government. He has accused NDI and other internationals who support this reform of trying to maintain the current governing coalition in power. In a recent meeting with NDI personnel, COM encouraged NDI to work with Thaci and take into account any legitimate concerns, such as using secret votes for sensitive matters like no-confidence votes, a practice not uncommon in the region and elsewhere in the democratic world. She also urged NDI to help implement this reform as quickly as possible, so that MPs voting on legislation implementing the Ahtisaari final status package over the coming months can be subject to Kosovar and international scrutiny.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: We have worked hard with individual MPs and others to see that the key reform of open voting is established. Kosovo being out of step with the rest of the states in the region (and in the democratic world) has been one of our most powerful arguments. We believe that, despite some unfounded criticism by opposition leader Thaci, this reform will go through in the near future and will benefit party discipline and the Assembly's transparency on implementing the final status package. END COMMENT.

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¶6. (SBU) U.S. Office Pristina clears this cable in its entirety for release to U.N. Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari.  
KAIDANOW